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MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES

VOL. XXIX. BALTIMORE, DECEMBER, 1914. No. 8.

AASE AND PEER GYNT

In a previous article (*Ibsen's Peer Gynt and Paa Vidderne, Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* Vol. IX, No. 1, 1910) the writer connected the whole scene in Gudbrandsdal, depicted in the first three acts of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt,* with the poem *Paa Vidderne* (1859), in which the general setting bore a marked resemblance to certain phases of Peer Gynt's early life. The hero in exile upon the mountains, his return to the valley to visit his mother, the description of the beautiful, naïve Norwegian girl, the little red hut, the cat, the aged mother, her death and the scene in which the hero bears her aloft to heaven; all these have their counterparts in both poems. It is a question, however, whether the relations of Peer Gynt to his mother may not have been tinged by sources extraneous to the poet, as well as by the previous poetic conception of the relations of mother to son, to which Ibsen himself had given such beautiful expression in *Paa Vidderne.*

In Oehlenschläger's *Aladdin* (1805) we have a relation of mother to son in Morgiane and Aladdin, which in its general conception and individual details bears such a striking resemblance to the relations of Aase to Peer Gynt in Ibsen's poem, that a comparison of the two works in this regard is not out of place, however fortuitous many of these resemblances may be or however much they may owe their origin to like situations.

It is not the purpose of this article to prove how far Ibsen was in general or in this particular regard indebted to Oehlenschläger for the material which he used in his dramas, or for his ideals of Romantic poetry. It is sufficient to state that especially in the very early part of his career [1] he was very strongly influenced by the great Danish Romantic poet.

The forerunners of *Peer Gynt* which gave poetic expression to the great life-problem of individuality are too numerous to mention. How far Ibsen may have drawn from these numerous sources in depicting the life of Peer Gynt, it is impossible to state.[2] But in view of Ibsen's close connection with the Danish Romantic School, it seems hardly probable that he was left entirely unaffected by the Danish masterpieces of this nature, especially such works as Heiberg's *En Sjæl efter Døden* (1841), Paludan-Müller's *Adam Homo* (1841) or Oehlenschläger's *Aladdin* (1805). If Ibsen was at all affected by any of these works, it is most natural to look to Oehlenschläger as the author to whom he was indebted, since Oehlenschläger exerted the strongest influence upon him of any of the Danish poets.

In *Aladdin* Oehlenschläger gives expression to the ideal of life which he himself held, which in essence was a justification of the Romantic conception of life, the realization of perfection through constant striving for the ideal. The tremendous influence which this work exerted throughout the North cannot be overestimated, and it is highly improbable that Ibsen was not strongly impressed both by the beauty and the inner significance of this poem. As regards the literary significance of *Aladdin,* Georg Brandes once said: "*Aladdin* er Udgangspunktet for nyere dansk Aandsliv, Grundstenen, over hvilken den Bygning er opført, som udgør dansk Litteratur i det 19. Aarhundredets første Halvdel."

In *Peer Gynt* Ibsen likewise gives expression, although in an entirely negative way, to his ideal of life, "*at være sig selv.*" The identity of purpose in depicting the inner struggle of the soul with the problems of life renders the assumption not impossible that Ibsen may have been affected by the impression which Oehlenschläger's work made upon the literary world of the North.

[1] Cf. especially "*Kjæmpehøien,*" 1850, which Henrik Jæger called "an impersonal study after the manner of Oehlenschläger's Norse tragedies."

[2] Cf. Christian Collin, *Ibsen's Peer Gynt,* Samtiden, p. 593 ff., 1913.

Aside from the fact that *Peer Gynt* was essentially a Romantic product (although, of course, the expression also of a totality of life which went far beyond the bounds set by the ideals of the Romantic School), there was something identical in the life of Ibsen with certain ideals and experiences in Oehlenschläger's life, which lend great plausibility to the belief that the scenes in which the relations of Aase to her son are depicted, may to a large extent have been colored by Oehlenschläger's *Aladdin.*

It is the purpose of this article to emphasize only one conception involved in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* and Oehlenschläger's *Aladdin.* This conception, identical in both poems, is the relations of mother to son; Aase to Peer Gynt in Ibsen's poem and Morgiane to Aladdin in Oehlenschläger's. The resemblance is so striking that one can hardly avoid the conclusion that Ibsen must have been affected in this regard by Oehlenschläger's *Aladdin,* even if one cannot prove that the individual features involved were directly due to Oehlenschläger's influence. Both Ibsen and Oehlenschläger modelled the character of the mother directly (although, of course, with necessary exaggeration) upon that of their own parent. In a letter to Peter Hansen (October 28, 1870) Ibsen says: "Dette digt (*Peer Gynt*) indeholder meget, som har sin foranledning i mit eget ungdomsliv; til Åse har, med fornødne overdrivelser, *min egen moder avgivet modellen.* (Ligeså til 'Inga' i 'Kongsemnerne')." And Oehlenschläger in his memoirs, after telling how Aladdin with his magic lamp was the symbolic expression of his own life's struggle as a poet, adds: "Min Moder var død, og da jeg skrev Aladdin's Vuggesang paa hans Moder's Grav, *flød mine Taarer over min egen Moder.*"

In both poems the hero is a dreamer who is a victim of circumstances and his own delusions. Aladdin works out his own salvation by a realization of his inherent powers. Peer Gynt, on the other hand, succumbs to his inherited weaknesses, failing to realize the true meaning of life. Of Peer Gynt Georg Brandes says (Verdens Gang, 1906): "Oprindelig er han et ganske interessant menneske, hvem forholdene mishandler." So, too, Nureddin says of Aladdin whom his mother has upbraided for his incapacity to comprehend the practical things of life (*Aladdin,* Act I):

> Saavidt som jeg kan mærke paa Aladdin,
> Saa er han af en ædel, stolt Natur.
> For ung til aabne sig en Bane,
> Nedtrykt af al den Armod rundt omkring sig.
> Er han ei vaagnet ret endnu, og derfor
> Har Leg og Lediggang bestandig tumlet
> Den ubevidste Siæl, som i en Vugge.

This Faustian stamp laid upon the characters of Peer Gynt and Aladdin renders their individuality in a measure identical and may account, to a certain extent, for the attitude in both poems of the practical mother towards a son whom she believes worthless, on account of this pernicious tendency to waste life in idle revery. It was Oehlenschläger's purpose to justify the idealist's dreams, while Ibsen portrayed the fatal results of a character which was absolutely incapable of putting its dreams into action. But, however much this may explain the general attitude of the mother to the son, identical in both poems, a comparison in detail of those scenes in which mother and son appear, reveals such a striking—in some cases an almost verbal—similarity that the writer is prone to believe that Aase and Peer reflected much that was represented in Oehlenschläger's Morgiane and Aladdin.

An attempt will here be made to connect in detail the identical features in these scenes between mother and son in the two poems. In general it may be said that in both poems the scenes in which mother and son are involved, are a very important feature in the delineation of the youthful character of the hero and from an esthetic view-point they are indispensable to the poetic value of the work, for they lend to both poems their highest flights of poetic fantasy and their most human and touching pathos. The detailed comparison is as follows.

In *Aladdin* (Act I) when Nureddin approaches Morgiane, as her alleged brother-in-law, for the purpose of soliciting the services of her son in the quest of the magic lamp, he

inquires into the character of Aladdin. Morgiane describes her son exactly as Peer Gynt is, a reckless, good-for-nothing young ruffian, who runs away from his work, leaving her with the whole responsibility of the household duties, tearing his clothes for her to mend, and continually getting into fights with the other boys of the village. Yet she always defends him whenever anyone else attempts to abuse him, just as Aase does Peer Gynt.

> Ak, hvortil han har Lyst? At gaae paa Gaden
> Den hele, lange Dag, at spille Skorsteen,
> Nærmest til Væg, Klink, Pind, og Sc i Hullet;
> At søle sig Snavset som *et Sviin,*
> *At rive Buxerne itu for Knæet,*
> At slide Hul paa sine Albuærmer,
> At *slaaes,* at *bande* og at *løbe gal.*

So, too, Aase (Act I) upbraids Peer for running off on a wild chase (for the deer) when duty demands him at home. He returns with torn trousers but without the game; a fruitless chase indicative of a careless regard for her and her household duties.

> Og du skæms ej for din moer?
> Først så *render du tilfjelds*
> månedsvis i travle ånnen,
> for at vejde ren på fånnen,
> kommer hjem *med reven pels,*
> *uden byrse, uden vildt.*

Peer, too, is continually getting into fights, the most famous of which was his battle at Lunde with his ancient enemy, the blacksmith. For this, too, Aase upbraids him.

> Kan du nægte
> du var fremste Mand i laget
> i det store basketaget,
> som for nylig stod på Lunde,
> der I slogs som olme Hunde.

Morgiane, in her answer to Nureddin, reproaches Aladdin for his absolute lack of practical sense. Though son of a tailor, "he doesn't know enough to comb his own hair."

> Hvad kan vel det forslaae? Han gidder ei
> Bestille—Gud forlade ham, det Skarn!
> Saa meget, som at *kæmme selv sit Haar.*

This reproach reminds one very strongly of the wise answer which Aase makes (Act I) to Peer's egotistical pretensions and wild prognostications of his future greatness.

> Gid du bare blev så klog,
> at du engang *kunde bøde*
> *flængen* i *din egen brog.*

In this same passage (Morgiane's answer to Nureddin's inquiries concerning Aladdin's character) Morgiane laments the fact that Aladdin's reckless conduct and impractical character have forced her to bear alone the whole burden of the home. She is now a widow, just as Aase is.

> *Alt ligger paa mig arme stakkels Kone.*
> Han skulde være *Skrædder, som hans Fader;*
> Men ak, Gud bedre ham for Skrædd'r, han er!

So Aase, too, upbraids Peer for not supporting her in her old age. He has wasted the wealth of his forefathers and, to crown all, has cast shame upon her name.

> **Ti stille!**
> Kan jeg glædes, om jeg vilde,
> jeg som har *sligt svin til søn?*
> Må det ikke bittert krænke
> mig, *en stakkars magtløs enke,*
> stødt at fange skam for løn?
> (græder igen)
> Hvad har slægten nu tilbage
> fra *din farfars velmagtsdage?*
> Hvor er skæpperne med mynt
> efter gamle Rasmus Gynt?
> . . . .
> Ak, du er dog stærk og stor,
> skulde *stå som stav og støtte*
> *for din gamle skrale moer.*

Morgiane, like Aase, has a most affectionate regard for her son and whenever anyone else attempts to abuse him, her mother-instinct impels her to defend him. Thus she always took his part when his father was alive, who was continually abusing him.

> Da Mustapha endnu var levende,
> Tog jeg det Skarn i Forsvar; Himlens Straf
> Nu kommer over mig for al min Svaghed.

This attitude on her part is especially evident (Act II) when Aladdin reports the shocking

news that Nureddin betrayed him and cruelly abused him by striking him in the face.

Morgiane.
(*opbragt*)
Og hvad som værre var: *slaa dig paa Øret,*
Saa nær du næsten havdet tumlet om.
Den næsviis! hvem har *givet ham vel Lov til*
At tugte fremmede Forældres Børn?
Den slette Karl!

So too Aase, though ready herself to flog Peer at any moment, always defends him against the insinuations or abuse of those outside the family, whether they be just or not. When the smithy in malicious glee threatens to hang Peer, Aase angrily defies him (Act I): "Hvad! Hænge min Peer! Ja, prøv om I tør;" and when Ingrid's father (Act I) swears that he will take Peer's life for the crime which the latter has committed, Aase likewise defies him with a mother's pride.

Hægstadbonden.
(kommer barhovedet og hvid af vrede).
Jeg tager hans liv for det bruderov!
Åse.
Å nej Gud straffe mig om I får lov!

Her unselfish mother's attitude towards Peer is summed up (Act II) in her reply to the man who consigns Peer on account of his sins to the eternal abode of the wicked.

Å-ja, å-ja;
jeg er dårlig; men gutten er bra'!

Morgiane, in spite of Aladdin's incapacity in practical affairs, has always fostered a firm faith in his future. She believes that some day he will be "something great," just as he has continually told her, although she reproaches him for his fanatical ideas and his connection with the magic lamp. She pictures him (Act II) as some day being a rich and prominent merchant from whom she shall buy her linen (the rich merchant was the highest ideal of success among the Mussulmen of the Orient).

Nu tænkte jeg
Saa vist, den hellige Grav var vel forvart
At vist du skulde *blevet noget Stort,*
At altid jeg mit Lærred skulde kiøbe
Hos dig, naar først du var en fornem Kiøbmand.

Peer's life is likewise made up of these extravagant pretensions, which he is continually trying to impress upon his mother (Act I).

Lille stygge, snille moer,
du kan lide på mit ord,
hele bygden skal dig hædre,
bare vent til jeg får gjort
noget—*noget rigtigt stort!*

His mother has shared his dreams with him from early infancy and although she indignantly reproaches him for his extravagant pretensions, nevertheless she is consciously or unconsciously a proud partner in his heralded future. When she is in an angry mood because of Peer's usurpation of her authority and his acts of violence towards her, she playfully prophesies that he will gain the crown of life upon the gallows (Act I): "du blir sagtens hængt tilsidst." But when her darling son is accused of being a hardened sinner and a criminal (Act II), she recounts his great deeds with a mother's pride, believing him, if opportunity allows, capable, in part at least, of the many "great things" which he has prophesied concerning himself.

Manden.
Tror du han kan for sin syndegæld sukke?
Åse.
(*ivrig*).
Nej, men han kan ride i luften på bukke!
. . . . .
Ingen gerning er ham for stor.
I skal se, får han bare leve så længe.

Aladdin, in his suit for the hand of the Sultan's daughter, selects his mother as his spokesman. He is induced to elect her to this perilous office because of his admiration for her superior wisdom. His mother assumes the obligations of this task, but true to her sincere and upright character warns Aladdin that she shall not attempt to conceal from the Sultan the fact as to her son's plebeian birth. She shall describe Aladdin just as he is, the son of *"en fattig Skrædderenke."*

So, too, Peer Gynt begs his mother (Act I) to act as his spokesman in his suit for Ingrid's hand. He would rather rely upon her wisdom than upon himself, of whose clumsiness and

lack of tact he is painfully conscious. Aase is glad to assume this office, in which she finds an opportunity to vent her anger by giving a truthful description of Peer's character, much to the latter's discomfort.

Peer.
Vær min talsmand. Du er klog;
snak med ham, den gamle dåren—
Åse.
Ja, det kan du bande på!
Du skal vakkert skudsmål få.
Skildres skal du for og agter;
alle dine fandens fagter
skal jeg nævne grejdt og grant.

When Aladdin (Act IV) is released from prison on condition that he shall restore the Sultan's daughter and the palace within a given time, he returns home to visit his mother. He is met at the door of his house by a stranger who informs him that his mother is dead. The stranger, ignorant of Aladdin's identity, tells him that Morgiane's son, by committing a crime (against the person of the Sultan) has caused her to die of a broken heart. Since Aladdin is now an outlaw, the few precious household goods are left without an inheritor. With deep pathos the stranger speaks of these simple articles of the home, which bring with them a flood of memories and tender associations.

Manden.
Gaa I kun med Gud.
Alting staar der endnu, som før det stod.
Det gamle Huusgeraad og hendes Rok.
Jeg veed ei ret, hvad jeg skal gjøre med det,
Det gamle Skramleri; det duer ikke,
Og der er ingen Arvinger, thi *Sønnen*
Har jo forbrudt sit Gods og Liv.
. . . . . .
Det er dog tungt for slige gamle Folk.
Hun døde nu af Kummer for sin Søn,
Det skammelige Skarn!

There is a strong resemblance in this scene to that in which Peer (Act III), after committing the bold crime of seducing Ingrid, returns to visit his mother. His offence against the law has resulted in the confiscation of his mother's household goods. With a pathos similar to that of the stranger in Aladdin, Aase and the faithful Kari (Act III) dwell upon the few articles of the household which the avaricious Hægstadbonde has overlooked; Peer's coat ("Kuften"), the skin-blanket, the old moulding ladle, his socks, and two old woolen shirts. Tender memories are associated with these simple things, which are all that is left of her beloved son. This sorrow, too, is directly followed by her death, just as in the case of Morgiane, although Aase does not expressly state that Peer was the cause of it.

Aladdin then (Act IV) enters the house and catching sight of the old spinning-wheel undisturbed in its customary place just as his mother has left it, plies it himself in playful and affectionate imitation of his mother. In this regard one is involuntarily reminded of Peer Gynt's boyish attempts to amuse his mother upon her death-bed and especially of that last great ride up to heaven when he throws the reins over the chair and licks up his steed, Grane, in boyish imitation of the many rides they used to take when mother and son still lived in the early youth of domestic joy and love.

Aladdin then (Act IV) goes out to his mother's grave and sings a cradle-song to her, that song over which the author himself shed tears in memory of his own mother, whose spirit had just passed away. There is a pathos and an affection here which approach very closely that sublime sentiment to which Ibsen gave expression in Aase's death-scene. It does not lie beyond the bounds of probability that Ibsen may have drawn inspiration for Aase's death-scene in *Peer Gynt* from the exquisite expression of maternal affection in Aladdin's "Vuggesang."

Both Aladdin and Peer treat their mother with a child's affection. Aladdin rocks his mother to sleep with a plaintive lullaby:

Visselulle nu, Barnlil!
Sov nu sødt, og sov nu længe,
Skiøndt din Vugge stander stil,
Uden Duun og uden Gænge.

Peer amuses his mother with childish ingenuity, seeking to quiet her pain and quell her fears. Both are filled with an inexpressible gratitude

for the love which the mother had bestowed upon each of them in his childhood. Their affection is naturally connected with those early days when the heart of the mother and child are as one. Aladdin's song is only in return for that which his mother once sang over his cradle.

> Du har ofte vugget mig,
> Nu skal jeg dig atter vugge.

Peer (Act III) likewise playfully reciprocates his mother's love when she rocked him to sleep in the cradle, as he presses the last kiss upon her cold cheek.

> Hav tak for alle dine dage,
> for bank og for *barne-bys!*
> Men nu får du takke tilbage—
> (trykker kinden mod hendes mund)
> Se så; det var tak for skyds.

It is possible also that Aladdin's "Vuggesang" may have suggested the form and sentiment of Solveig's song:

> Sov du, dyreste gutten min!
> Jeg skal vugge dig, jeg skal våge.

although there is, of course, no necessary connection between the two.

Aladdin imagines (Act IV) that he is still in possession of the magic lamp. Concealing this imaginary lamp beneath his cloak he sallies forth into the crowd upon the street, confident that by virtue of his magic lamp he will straightway retrieve his ill fortune. He is met on all sides by jeers and derisive laughter from the crowd, who believe him mad. Stung to the quick Aladdin resents their taunts and resorts to active violence by pelting them with stones. He warns them to step out of the way when he conjures up the lost palace, lest they be crushed to death. He himself leaps out of the way, which confirms them in their conviction that he is a mad dreamer and adds to their amusement in taunting an eccentric character.

> Tag jer i Agt, nu kommer Slottet strax,
> Staa det i Veien ei, det Knuser eder.
> (han løber tilside. *En stor Skoggerlatter*).

Even so does Peer Gynt (Act I) furnish endless amusement for the peasants assembled at Ingrid's wedding festival. They delight in taunting this eccentric dreamer who makes such amusing pretensions concerning himself, just as is the case with Aladdin. Their jeers and mockery cut Peer to the quick.

> Stødt så flirer de bag ens ryg,
> og tisker, så det tvers igennem en brænder
> . . . . .
> Øjekast; sylhvasse tanke og smil.
> Det gnisler, som sagbladet under en fil.

But strong brandy soon heals Peer's sensitive pride, whereupon he indulges in those wild tales for which he is famous and which lend amusement to the festive occasion. The older, more sober members of the crowd are sure that Peer is mad.

> Peer Gynt
> (med et slæng)
> Hej, jeg kan ride
> rakt gennem luften på gilde heste!
> Å, jeg kan mangeting, jeg, skal I vide.
> (*Skoggerlatter* igen).

The similarity in these scenes, just mentioned in the two works, consists of the wild dreams which both heroes foster, their sensitive natures and the cruel attitude of an unsympathetic, realistic world.

Aladdin then casts aside his imaginary lamp, whose worthlessness he has discovered, and starts out on his journey of life in quest of the true lamp. Peer Gynt's real life in the active world likewise begins after his mother's death.

This brief comparison of the scenes in which mother and son are involved in Oehlenschläger's *Aladdin* and Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* points toward the conclusion that, although much may be fortuitous by virtue of the similarity of character in the person of Aladdin and Peer Gynt, yet it is equally probable that in these particular scenes Ibsen may have, to a certain extent at least, been indebted to Oehlenschläger both for his inspiration in general and for many individual features involved in Peer Gynt's relations to his mother, Aase. The character of the mother, based as it was in both poems

upon that of the author's own parent has a universal sympathy and affection which is characteristic of all true mothers. But this will hardly account for the striking similarity in detail which both poems show in those scenes where the relation of mother and son is involved.

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TWO DISCIPLES OF TRANSCENDENTALISM

It has been said by someone[1] that Emerson holds in America about the same position as a reflector of spiritual experience and as an interpreter of the characteristic thought of his times as Tennyson holds in England. Other than this statement no one, so far as known to me, has thought of coupling the names of these two writers. Yet a comparison of their writings reveals certain likenesses which may have been overlooked. Tennyson was not, of course, the same kind of philosopher as Emerson was; his thoughts ranged over a wider field, and he did not concern himself entirely with speculations about the soul and its relations. He was interested in the great social and political questions of his day also. Nevertheless, when Tennyson did drop into meditation about matters spiritual we find him in a rather transcendental atmosphere and very close to Emerson.

On comparing them, one is impressed by many parallelisms in their thoughts, not only in the published essays and poems, but in observations uttered from time to time and recorded by their biographers. These similarities are most striking, however, in those writings which are admittedly the chief expressions of thought concerning spiritual things. *In Memoriam, The Higher Pantheism, The Ancient Sage* contain mainly Tennyson's idealistic views, while the central thought of all Emerson's philosophy is found in the essay, "The Over-Soul." There are passages in Tennyson that are almost and often altogether identical in thought with passages in Emerson's essays; their likenesses are indeed so striking that when I first observed them I hesitated to publish them because I thought it impossible that they had not been noticed. But I have searched in vain through the commentators and can find no instance of where Tennyson has been called a transcendentalist or where his name has been linked to that of Emerson.

Let us take as a first example, just to see how they touch each other, their attitude toward doctrine or formal belief. We find that neither Tennyson nor Emerson had a definite or formal system of belief. Emerson, in a letter to a Dr. Ware, who had taken exception to some of his views, writes, "I could not give an account of myself if challenged. I could not possibly give you one of the arguments you so cruelly hint at on which any doctrine of mine stands." Tennyson, we are told in the *Memoir* (vol. I, p. 308), once said that he would not formulate his creed, for people would not understand him if he did. He was one of those who seemed:

> To have reached a purer air,
> Whose faith has center everywhere
> Nor cares to fix itself to form.

Compare also what they both held about immortality. Emerson believed in immortality "not because of the statement of Luke and John but because it is a law of the spirit," and Tennyson writes (*In Memoriam,* xxxiv),

> My own dim life should teach me this
> That life shall live for evermore.

We find this passage from Emerson, "Love is our highest word and the synonym of God" (Essay on "Love"). And with the same meaning of the word love, Tennyson at the beginning of his elegy invokes the "Strong Son of God, Immortal Love."

They held, too, the same idea as to beauty or art, for Emerson writes (Essay on "Art"), "As soon as beauty is sought, not from religion and love but for pleasure, it degrades the

[1] H. W. Mabie, "How to Study Tennyson and Emerson," *Ladies Home Journal,* March, 1908.